

WEST TEXAS VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

Vital Signs

SPRING 2020

COVER STORY:

Reaching Veterans Where They Live-Work-and Play

FACES of VA

CLINIC UPDATES:

Small House
Community
Living Center



PROUDLY SERVING VETERANS OF WEST TEXAS FROM LOCATIONS IN

ABILENE • BIG SPRING • FORT STOCKTON • HOBBS • SAN ANGELO • STAMFORD • PERMIAN BASIN

Vital Signs

SPRING 2020

INAUGURAL EDITION

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
West Texas VA Health Care System

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Vital Signs is published for Veterans living in West Texas. We welcome your story ideas and suggestions. Send to WTVAPublicAffairs@va.gov

WEST TEXAS VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM (WTVAHCS) PROUDLY SERVES VETERANS IN 33 COUNTIES ACROSS 55,000 SQUARE MILES OF RURAL GEOGRAPHY IN WEST TEXAS AND EASTERN NEW MEXICO. MORE THAN 56,000 VETERANS RESIDE WITHIN THE SERVICE AREA, OF WHICH APPROXIMATELY 17,000 RECEIVE CARE AT WTVAHCS. ON AVERAGE, THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM SUPPORTS MORE THAN 170,000 OUTPATIENT VISITS ANNUALLY.

Your Health Our Mission



11 Allison Green, Nurse Practitioner at West Texas VA Health Care System, is credited with naming 'Vital Signs' magazine. A native Big Springer, Allison is a graduate of Texas Tech and as you will read in this edition, stood up our first all-female primary care team to care for women Veterans.



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Director's Message

Recognizing our solemn responsibility to our Veterans every day

Our only mission at West Texas VA Health Care System is your health – healing our Veterans. This is a responsibility each member of the WTVAHCS recommitments themselves to every day as we cross the threshold into the revered halls of your VA health care facilities. Covering an area of more than 55,00 square miles, in a state where more than 25 percent of Veterans are choosing to make home, our team of more than 700 caregivers and staff are focused on one thing – your health.

With initiatives such as Whole Health, VA Video Connect, Home Telehealth Monitoring and dedicated outreach efforts, WTVAHCS is - I am - committed to doing everything possible to bring VA health care to our Veterans – where they live, work, study and play. The unique geographical challenges we face in West Texas, are challenges we will not shy away from. I am determined to find equally unique solutions that bridge

the distances between our Veterans and their VA health care system. We can only do this with your help however, and I must say the support West Texas communities provides to WTVAHCS is unparalleled. We will do all we can to reach all of our Veterans – but ask your assistance in spreading the word that we are here; we are committed to serving you.

We understand that the very freedoms we enjoy, were paid for by the service and sacrifice of our women and men of the armed services – and now it's our responsibility to fulfill the promise our country made to you. I am humbled and honored to serve you as the Director of West Texas VA Health Care System – thank you.

In your service,
JASON CAVE, DIRECTOR

"We will do all we can to reach all of our Veterans."



Over a geographical area of more than 55,000 square miles, West Texas VA Health Care System is pulling out all the stops to meet the health care needs of its Veterans. Through greater use of technologies like VAVideo Connect, Home Telehealth Monitoring and Clinical Video Telehealth, WTVAHCS is able to reach more Veterans, improving access to care and more importantly, the health of our Veterans. Navy and Army Veteran Kenneth Turner is one such Veteran.

Reaching Veterans Where They Live - Work - and Play

Turner was the first WTVAHCS Veteran to receive specialized care using VAVideo Connect to complete a consult with a specialist out of North Texas VA Health Care System (NTXVAHCS) based in Dallas.

"This has changed my treatment experience - having a provider available for me in the comfort of my local VA," said Turner. "The video connection made it easy to see my provider. I was able to walk and demonstrate how well I have been doing working with my Physical Therapists".

West Texas VA relies on community care providers for many of the prosthetics needs of its Veterans, and now with the collaboration between WTVAHCS and NTXVAHCS with VAVideo Connect, WTVAHCS Veterans now enjoy greater access to care, without having to make the four-hour drive to Dallas. Turner recently lost his right leg to

diabetes and has been receiving care from VA for more than a year. Originally a patient of the NTXVAHCS, Turner moved to Big Spring, TX to be closer to his daughter and now receives care here.

"When Veterans need repairs or a new prosthesis, we had to rely on community providers," said Katherine Price, West Texas VA Physical Therapist. "Working with Dallas VA has given our Veterans better access to care."

VAVideo Connect is a service that offers Veterans the ability to connect with their health care team from anywhere – via cell, laptop, tablet or any internet capable device. Veterans can connect with their provider from home, work, where ever they may be.

VAVideo Connect is just one of the technology-based solutions VA has implemented to meet the needs of the

"Since Telehealth has been implemented, Veterans are getting a better overall experience when it comes to prosthetics. With the ability to be seen by VA providers who work only with Veterans, the level of specialty care is improved dramatically."

KATHERINE PRICE, WEST TEXAS VA PHYSICAL THERAPIST



nation's more than 9 million Veterans. Another such technology is Home Telehealth Monitoring (HTM). HTM offers Veterans with chronic health conditions the ability to track their daily health status, from the comfort of their home. HTM is a remote monitoring service that allows the Veteran's physician or nurse to monitor the Veteran's medical condition remotely using home monitoring equipment.

Veterans can be referred to a care coordinator for enrollment in Remote Monitoring services by any member of their care team. Enrollment is approved by a VA provider for Veterans who meet the clinical need for the service.

A care coordinator is assigned and receives and reviews health information that each Veteran provides through personalized questions answered either on special equipment, by a Veteran's

computer or their phone. If any of the Veteran's health measurements do not seem normal, the care coordinator talks with the Veteran's primary care team and then gets back to the Veteran with next steps.

Turner, a Veteran era Veteran, has charged ahead with this home based remote monitoring system. "This little machine works miracles – it saves me trips to the VA – and provides care every day," says Turner.

HTM is designed for Veterans with chronic conditions like diabetes or chronic heart disease, that could lead to emergency room visits - when the Veteran's condition declines, yet there's little to no outward signs until it's too late. The system connects Veterans directly with their nurse health care coordinator and monitors key health indicators, so that declining conditions

are caught and treated – before the Veteran ends up in the emergency room.

"I receive health check-ups from my Veterans daily," says Luis Villamizar, Telehealth RN. "I'm able to help keep them on track with their medications, nutrition, physical activity, or arrange an appointment if necessary."

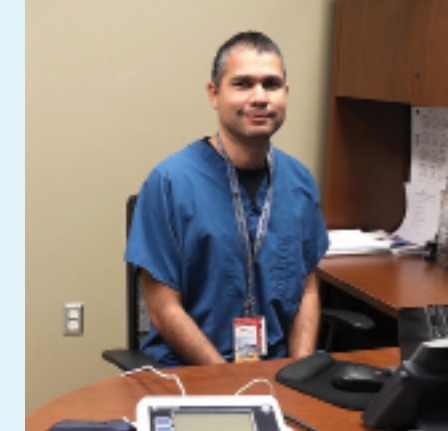
Receiving daily checkups with key information like blood sugar, blood pressure and other vitals, Villamizar monitors his Veterans closely and reaches out when necessary.

"My blood sugar was high this morning," said Turner. "I'm going to get a call from Luis, he'll want to know why my blood sugar is high."

Through these and other technology assisted programs, WTVAHCS is reaching more Veterans every day, in more remote locations, and is bringing the VA to where they live, work and play.

"I'm grateful that I did not have to travel to make this appointment. Having the doctor in the room with me and being able to discuss my rehab with all the professionals in one place, really makes me feel like I'm receiving the best possible care."

KENNETH TURNER, NAVY/ARMY VETERAN



Luis Villamizar, RN

is the Lead Care Coordinator for the Home Telehealth program at West Texas VA Health Care System. He coordinates care at home with Veterans by using equipment provided by VA similar to what is pictured. Using these specialized monitors, Villamizar receives reports daily on his Veterans' condition, can teleconference directly with them if needed. This system monitors vital signs and key health indicators for those with chronic conditions such as diabetes, COPD, hypertension, and others. Food and Nutrition services also work closely with Villamizar to promote disease prevention through tele-MOVE program and by providing healthy eating tips.

"It is rewarding to be able to follow Veterans and their health care on a daily basis and to watch them improve."

LUIS VILLAMIZAR, RN

David Stubblefield U.S. Army

INFANTRY
WORLD WAR II

The greatest honor, and the best day in my life – after the day I married my wife course, was the day I met General Dwight D. Eisenhower. Stubblefield found himself walking down a street in Japan following the signing of the Armistice, officially ending World War II, and up ahead he witnessed a motorcade headed his direction – the lead vehicle was flying the U.S. flag on its front fender. “I thought to myself, wow this has to be someone really important, so I popped to and offered my sharpest salute,” says Stubblefield.

Just three months ago I visited President Eisenhower’s hometown, Denison, TX, on his birthday to visit his museum, and I got to talk with President Eisenhower’s granddaughter. I was able to help with the construction of the museum, and it was such an honor to be there, to speak with his family. “He knew what he was doing, he did it right,” said Stubblefield about General and President Eisenhower.



Estella Craven U.S. Navy

MASTER OF ARMS

I served out of a sense of duty. Many in my family have served for our great country. For me, serving was a way to continue that tradition of service and honor.

I served from 1988 to 1994 for the U.S. Navy as a Master at Arms. When I enlisted, we were a nation at peace, but shortly thereafter the first Gulf War - Operation Desert Storm had begun. During my service, I made lifetime friends with fellow ship mates. I was able to see the world thanks to the Navy that I might not have experienced if I didn’t join.

Working for the VA now allows me to give back to my fellow Veterans. Many Veterans coming back from our current wars, struggle to find their way and their new purpose in life. As a Human Resource Specialist for West Texas VA Health Care System, I am able to help Veterans who are trying to find their place in society - and that is very rewarding.



Don O'Keeffe
U.S. Army | 173 A.B.
CHAPLAIN ASSISTANT

Howard Armstrong
U.S. Army | 1952-1954
KOREAN WAR
COMBAT ENGINEER

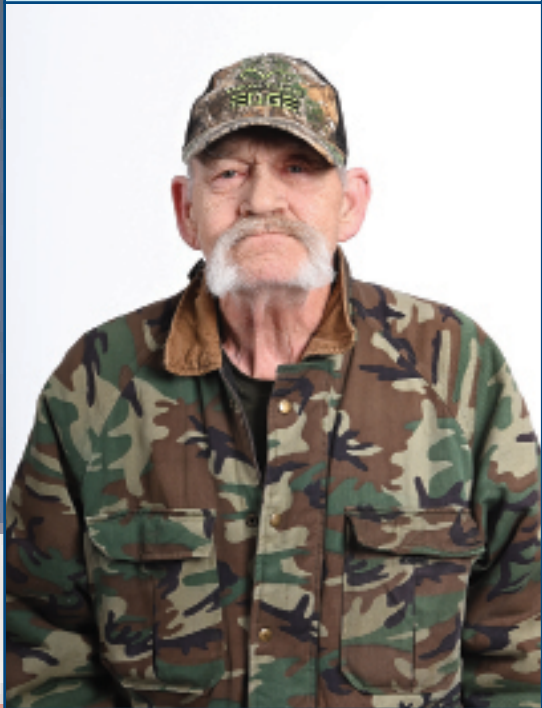
Robert Pyle
U.S. Navy | 1962-1971

Deon Mealing
U.S. Army | 2001-2007
HEAVY EQUIPMENT
TRANSPORTER
OEF/OIF VETERAN



FACES of VA

Jerry Self U.S. Army
1972-1975
COMBAT ENGINEER



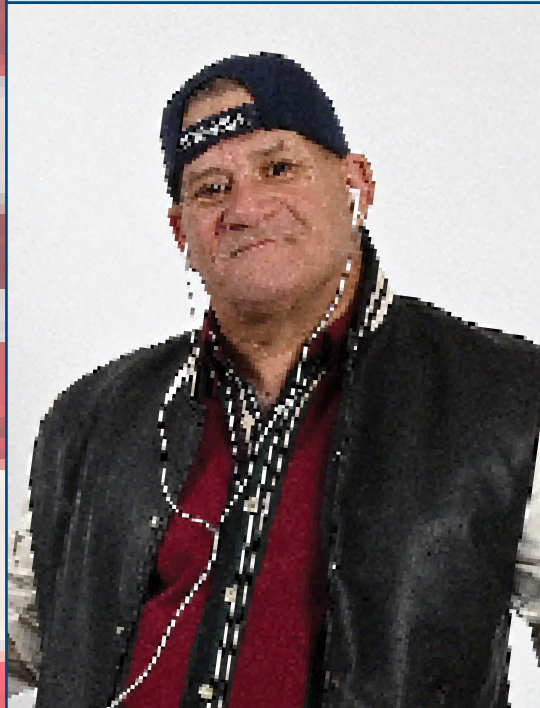
William Cook U.S. Air Force
1969-1973
JET ENGINE MECHANIC



David Villesca U.S. Army
2008-2012
82ND AIRBORNE



Cedric Wilson U.S. Army
1983-1984



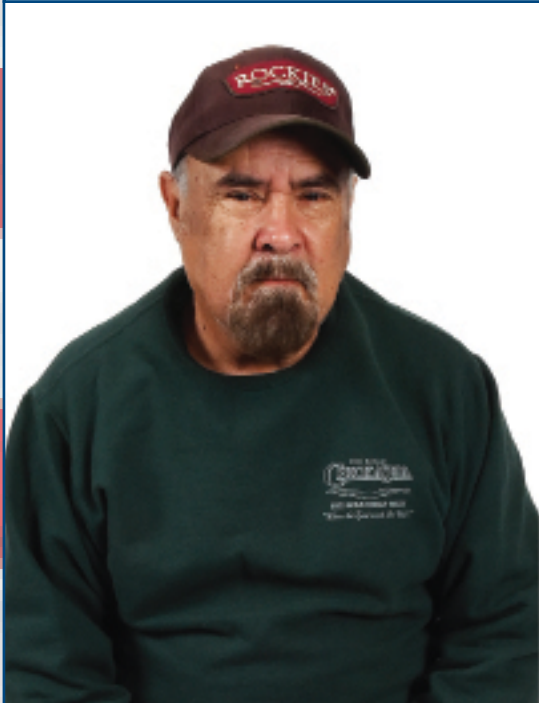
Estella Villarreal U.S. Navy
2000-2004
AVIATION MACHINIST MATE



Manuel D. Chavarria U.S. Army
1968-1971
11B INFANTRY



Sam Peña U.S. Navy
1973-1976



Carl Lancaster U.S. Army
ARMY VETERAN



FACES of VA



Story and photos by Kelli Kay Stolle, Public Affairs Specialist with West Texas VA Health Care System.

The San Angelo VA Clinic celebrated its new location with an August 20 ribbon cutting ceremony attended by veterans and their families, local dignitaries, community members, and a special guest speaker. After speaking with veterans about the VA and their concerns and taking a tour of the new clinic, Sen. John Cornyn served as the keynote speaker for the ceremony. He expressed the importance of Veterans healthcare and noted how the new space will allow more face to face care for local veterans.

"Congress has tried to respond with the VA Mission Act and VA Choice Program," said Cornyn, "so that outstanding clinics like this can provide services to those who need those services here. But also, to work in the community so that people who need in-patient treatment or other specialized care, they can get it." He also told a KLST-TV (CBS-San Angelo) reporter that veterans only had great things to say

about their care at the San Angelo VA. With 9,880 square-feet and more than double the size of the old location, the San Angelo VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic, part of the West Texas VA Health Care System, has more space to better accommodate the health care needs of area veterans. With primary care and mental health services, lab collection, social work, Telehealth services, and Home-Based Primary Care, the new clinic will expand to offer more services in the near future.

"We are looking forward to a third primary care physician starting soon and are interviewing for a fourth right now. We are hearing from our veterans that they are so impressed with the new building and are excited that we are expanding services."

NURSE MANAGER TYNDELL LIGHT, R.N.

On August 20, the West Texas VA Health Care System invited veterans, family members and the community to a ceremony for the new San Angelo VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic. James Douglas, Interim Associate Director; Jason Cave, Interim Director; Tyndall Light, Nurse Manager; and John Cornyn, U.S. Senator (from left to right) cut the ribbon to officially open the clinic.

During an interview with KSAN-TV (NBC-San Angelo), Interim Director Jason Cave reiterated the health care system's commitment to San Angelo and the local veteran population.

"We have an all-volunteer military these days, that means not only the people who actually wear the uniform, but their families who serve as well. We understand that, particularly here in San Angelo and Goodfellow AFB. It is important that we keep our commitment and keep those folks in mind," said Cave during the interview. "We must keep our commitment to them when they take the uniforms off and provide them the healthcare they have earned." That is the main reason they have expanded services in San Angelo.

Veterans deserve it.

New Women Veteran Primary Care Team at West Texas VA aims to serve

Women are the fastest growing demographic within the Veteran population, and Texas is the number one destination for Veterans. Couple these attributes together and it is no surprise that West Texas VA Health Care System (WTVAHCS) is seeing Women Veterans signing up for VA health care and benefits at higher rates than ever before.

Since admitting its first patient in 1950, WTVAHCS has dedicated itself to providing the highest level of care to all its Veterans. Just as the role of women in the military has evolved since 1950, so has the need to provide them with high quality health care. Nurse Practitioner Allison Green is the next evolution of providing the highest level of care for our Women Veterans in West Texas.

"I'm a West Texas girl," says Green. "I remember growing up, going to the family doctor – a friend, someone we all knew. That small-town doctor feel is how I approach my Women Veterans."

Veterans Health Administration (VHA) leads the nation in the diagnosis and treatment of many medical conditions unique to Women Veterans.

Although women's health services were offered within the Medical Center's primary care clinic, the new focus on a Women Veteran specific Patient Aligned Care Team is new, and one WTVAHCS plans on expanding.

"I'm very excited to have a dedicated Women Veteran's clinic," said U.S.

Army Veteran Samantha Castro. "I've primarily used urgent care prior to this and this is just better in every aspect – environment, relationship, and personal comfort."

The new clinic eliminates barriers to Women Veterans' access to specialized health care services, and to their ability to use those services. It addresses those concerns by integrating care, promoting gender sensitivity, and providing a safe and comfortable environment in which Women Veterans' care is provided.

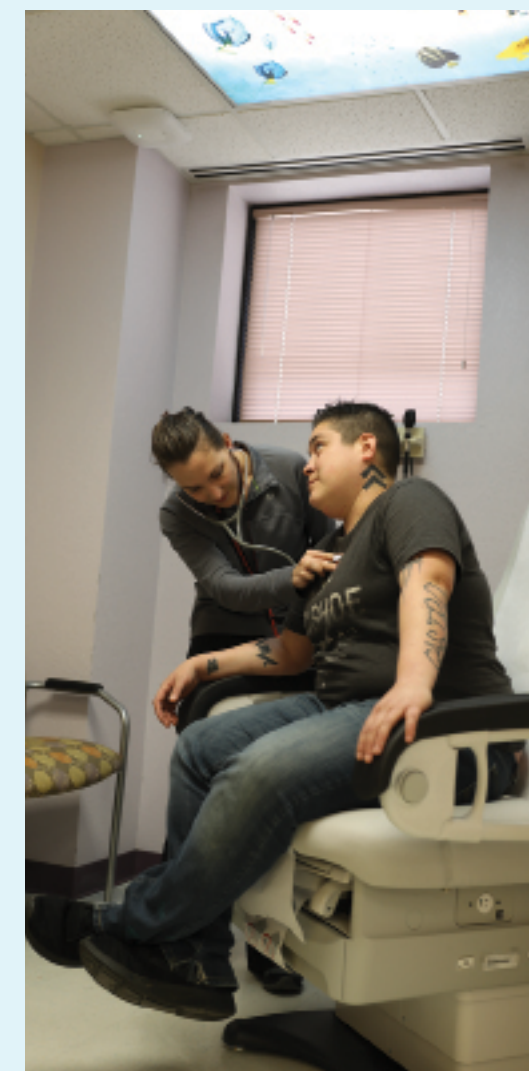
Women Veterans face the same healthcare concerns as their civilian counterparts however, military service can, and often does, result in unique health challenges.

"I think it's important for women to be comfortable with their care provider. If, by being a woman care provider, I can encourage more women Veterans to come in and receive care, then I feel as though I've accomplished a lot in supporting our Veterans."

NURSE PRACTITIONER ALLISON GREEN

In 1988 VA committed to being fully equipped to care for its growing female Veteran population by establishing the Women Veterans Health Program, now called Women's Health Service.

The current population of women Veterans is 9 percent, up from 4.4 percent in 1988. With more than 400,000 women currently serving in the Armed Forces, that percentage is expected to grow significantly by 2040, according to VA data.



West Texas VA holds ribbon cutting for first Small House Community Living Center

More than fifty staff, guests, and Veterans joined West Texas VA Health Care System Interim Director Jason Cave to mark the opening of the first Small House Community Living Center, named Sand Castle, in a ribbon cutting ceremony March 10. The Sand Castle Small House is the first of four planned Community Living Center cottages for the Big Spring, Texas, VA medical center. The Small Houses are designed to offer a home-like atmosphere with spacious common living spaces, full kitchen, fireplace, ten private rooms with private baths and other amenities for the Veterans and their guests. Sand Castle began about eight years ago as a concept and goal for West Texas VA, and the ribbon cutting marks a significant milestone for West Texas VA's commitment to our Veterans and our mission of to serve the health care needs of our Veterans through excellence in service.

'Sand Castle Small House' is the first of four planned community living center cottages

The building project began April 21, 2017 with a groundbreaking ceremony and construction was completed September 11, 2019. West Texas VA staff have been working to equip, test and prepare the first of its kind structure for occupancy and officially opened Sand Castle Small



House with the ribbon cutting ceremony. "I have been privileged to serve here for a few months now. VA has the best mission of any federal agency and that is why I chose to work at VA, our Veterans have given of themselves in their service to our nation, it is a privilege to serve them," said Cave.

"The reason why Sand Castle Small House is here, is because of the outstanding staff and their can-do spirit." Cave thanked all the staff members who worked passionately to bring this project to this point. He commented on the members of his staff who did the little things, such as the members of the engineering staff who preserved the wood of the oak tree that had been on the site. Because of their diligence, the wood mantle for the fireplace and the fireplaces in the other small houses to come came from that oak tree.

"This first cottage is dedicated to Veterans in need of hospice care as they come close to the end of their lives. It is also for their families. It provides a place where families

can spend private time with their loved one and have the privacy to speak with their pastor or a chaplain when they need encouragement."

JASON CAVE, DIRECTOR



DENNIS NIXON AND CLARA LEWIS

She is an inspiration

Known simply as Ms. Clara, Clara Lewis has given more than 43,000 hours of her most precious resource – time – to the Veterans of West Texas. The Disabled American Veterans (DAV) and the West Texas VA Health Care System's George H. O'Brien, Jr. VA Medical Center staff recognized Ms. Clara's volunteer service in a December 4 ceremony.

Former national DAV commander Dennis Nixon presented Lewis the DAV Volunteer of the Year Award. The widow of a retired Air Force Veteran, Ms. Clara began volunteering more than 44 years ago and has served in nearly every capacity a volunteer can in the medical center.

"I'm here for the Veterans," said Lewis. "When my husband was receiving care here, I saw the need and I vowed then to do all I can for our Veterans." Having served in mental health services, the community living center, the domiciliary and a host of other positions, Lewis can now be found every weekday morning at the main reception desk greeting every Veteran with a smile and asking, "How can I help you today?"

Lewis was due to receive the award earlier this year at the national DAV

conference in Orlando, but weather conditions fouled her travel plans. That's when Nixon stepped in and made a personal trip to West Texas to make the presentation. Nixon remarked on the service. "She is my impact Ms. Clara has had on generations of Veterans over her four decades of service: 'More than any other person, Ms. Clara has done more to improve the West Texas VA through her generosity, her sincere love for our Veterans and her warmth.'"

In 2018, the West Texas VA dedicated the medical center's main waiting area in honor of Lewis, naming the space the Clara Lewis Outpatient Waiting Area. Fittingly, the staff held the ceremony in Lewis' waiting room.

"Some call me an angel," said Lewis. "They only see that side, but believe me, I am here to see that our Veterans receive the best we have to offer. They deserve nothing less."

VA Health Care Near You

George H. O'Brien Medical Center 432-263-7361

Outpatient Clinics

Abilene CBOC	325-695-3252
San Angelo CBOC	325-658-6138
Permian Basin CBOC	432-685-2110
Hobbs CBOC	575-391-0354
Fort Stockton CBOC	800-472-1365 ext. 4100

Veteran Centers

Midland Vet Center	432-697-8222
Abilene Vet Center	325-232-7925

Telephone Care

Make/Change Appointment	432-463-7361 ext. 2800
VA Notification Line (within 72 hours of admission to E.R./Hospital)	432-263-7361 ext. 2526
Eligibility	432-263-7361 ext. 7347
Nurse Triage Line	1-866-862-7863

Pharmacy

Renew/Refill Medications	432-263-7361 ext. 2600
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More VA Services

VA Benefits	800-827-1000
VA Health Resource Center	877-222-8387
VA Health Resource Center	866-393-9132
Chaplain Service	432-263-7361 ext. 7261 & 4823
Recreation Service	432-263-7361 ext. 7284
Social Work	432-263-7361 ext. 7492 & 7032
Women's Clinic	432-263-7361 ext. 7175
Voluntary Service	432-263-7361 ext. 7136 & 4824

Crisis Hotlines

Veterans Crisis Line	800-273-TALK (800-273-8255)
Women Veterans Hotline	855-VA-WOMEN (855-829-6636)
Combat Call Center	877-WAR-VETS (877-927-8387)
National Call Center for Homeless Veterans	877-424-3838

Visit myhealth.va.gov



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
West Texas VA Health Care System

www.bigspring.va.gov

re·sil·ient | /ri-'zil-yə nt/

adjective

Definition: Characterized or marked by resilience: such as

a : capable of withstanding shock without permanent deformation or rupture

b : tending to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change

Though many Veterans suffer physical and emotional trauma, the military experience is defined by resilience. Veterans counted on each other to perform under pressure while in uniform—quitting was never an option. Today's Veteran is strong and courageous; a valuable member of society who is well-versed in making the impossible, reality, and the possible, extraordinary.



Thank you for your service.